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Classified By: Ambassador William J. Burns. Reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

1. (C) Summary. Following a muted first reaction to Ukraine's intent to seek a NATO Membership Action Plan (MAP) at the Bucharest summit (ref A), Foreign Minister Lavrov and other senior officials have reiterated strong opposition, stressing that Russia would view further eastward expansion as a potential military threat. NATO enlargement, particularly to Ukraine, remains "an emotional and neuralgic" issue for Russia, but strategic policy considerations also underlie strong opposition to NATO membership for Ukraine and Georgia. In Ukraine, these include fears that the issue could potentially split the country in two, leading to violence or even, some claim, civil war, which would force Russia to decide whether to intervene. Additionally, the GOR and experts continue to claim that Ukrainian NATO membership would have a major impact on Russia's defense industry, Russian-Ukrainian family connections, and bilateral relations generally. In Georgia, the GOR fears continued instability and "provocative acts" in the separatist regions. End summary.

MFA: NATO Enlargement "Potential Military Threat to Russia"
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2. (U) During his annual review of Russia's foreign policy January 22-23 (ref B), Foreign Minister Lavrov stressed that Russia had to view continued eastward expansion of NATO, particularly to Ukraine and Georgia, as a potential military threat. While Russia might believe statements from the West that NATO was not directed against Russia, when one looked at recent military activities in NATO countries (establishment of U.S. forward operating locations, etc. they had to be evaluated not by stated intentions but by potential. Lavrov stressed that maintaining Russia's "sphere of influence" in the neighborhood was anachronistic, and acknowledged that the U.S. and Europe had "legitimate interests" in the region. But, he argued, while countries were free to make their own decisions about their security and which political-military structures to join, they needed to keep in mind the impact on their neighbors.

3. (U) Lavrov emphasized that Russia was convinced that enlargement was not based on security reasons, but was a legacy of the Cold War. He disputed arguments that NATO was an appropriate mechanism for helping to strengthen democratic governments. He said that Russia understood that NATO was in search of a new mission, but there was a growing tendency for new members to do and say whatever they wanted simply because they were under the NATO umbrella (e.g. attempts of some new member countries to "rewrite history and glorify fascists").

4. (U) Giving a press briefing January 22 in response to a question about Ukraine's request for a MAP, the MFA said "a radical new expansion of NATO may bring about a serious political-military shift that will inevitably affect the security interests of Russia." The spokesman went on to stress that Russia was bound with Ukraine by bilateral obligations set forth in the 1997 Treaty on Friendship, Cooperation and Partnership in which both parties undertook to "refrain from participation in or support of any actions capable of prejudicing the security of the other Side." The spokesman noted that Ukraine's "likely integration into NATO would seriously complicate the many-sided Russian-Ukrainian relations," and that Russia would "have to take appropriate measures." The spokesman added that "one has the impression that the present Ukrainian leadership regards rapprochement with NATO largely as an alternative to good-neighborly ties with the Russian Federation."

Russian Opposition Neuralgic and Concrete
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5. (C) Ukraine and Georgia's NATO aspirations not only touch a raw nerve in Russia, they engender serious concerns about the consequences for stability in the region. Not only does Russia perceive encirclement, and efforts to undermine Russia's influence in the region, but it also fears unpredictable and uncontrolled consequences which would seriously affect Russian security interests. Experts tell us that Russia is particularly worried that the strong divisions in Ukraine over NATO membership, with much of the ethnic-Russian community against membership, could lead to a major split, involving violence or at worst, civil war. In that eventuality, Russia would have to decide whether to

intervene; a decision Russia does not want to have to face.

6. (C) Dmitriy Trenin, Deputy Director of the Carnegie Moscow Center, expressed concern that Ukraine was, in the long-term, the most potentially destabilizing factor in U.S.-Russian relations, given the level of emotion and neuralgia triggered by its quest for NATO membership. The letter requesting MAP consideration had come as a "bad surprise" to Russian officials, who calculated that Ukraine's NATO aspirations were safely on the backburner. With its public letter, the issue had been "sharpened." Because membership remained divisive in Ukrainian domestic politics, it created an opening for Russian intervention. Trenin expressed concern that elements within the Russian establishment would be encouraged to meddle, stimulating U.S. overt encouragement of opposing political forces, and leaving the U.S. and Russia in a classic confrontational posture. The irony, Trenin professed, was that Ukraine's membership would defang NATO, but neither the Russian public nor elite opinion was ready for that argument. Ukraine's gradual shift towards the West was one thing, its preemptive status as a de jure U.S. military ally another. Trenin cautioned strongly against letting an internal Ukrainian fight for power, where MAP was merely a lever in domestic politics, further complicate U.S.-Russian relations now.

7. (C) Another issue driving Russian opposition to Ukrainian membership is the significant defense industry cooperation the two countries share, including a number of plants where Russian weapons are made. While efforts are underway to shut down or move most of these plants to Russia, and to move the Black Sea fleet from Sevastopol to Novorossiysk earlier than the 2017 deadline, the GOR has made clear that Ukraine's joining NATO would require Russia to make major (costly) changes to its defense industrial cooperation.

8. (C) Similarly, the GOR and experts note that there would also be a significant impact on Russian-Ukrainian economic and labor relations, including the effect on thousands of Ukrainians living and working in Russia and vice versa, due to the necessity of imposing a new visa regime. This, Aleksandr Konovalov, Director of the Institute for Strategic Assessment, argued, would become a boiling cauldron of anger and resentment among the local population.

9. (C) With respect to Georgia, most experts said that while not as neuralgic to Russia as Ukraine, the GOR viewed the situation there as too unstable to withstand the divisiveness NATO membership could cause. Aleksey Arbatov, Deputy Director of the Carnegie Moscow Center, argued that Georgia's NATO aspirations were simply a way to solve its problems in Abkhazia and South Ossetia, and warned that Russia would be put in a difficult situation were that to ensue.

Russia's Response
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10. (C) The GOR has made it clear that it would have to "seriously review" its entire relationship with Ukraine and Georgia in the event of NATO inviting them to join. This could include major impacts on energy, economic, and political-military engagement, with possible repercussions throughout the region and into Central and Western Europe. Russia would also likely revisit its own relationship with the Alliance and activities in the NATO-Russia Council, and consider further actions in the arms control arena, including the possibility of complete withdrawal from the CFE and INF Treaties, and more direct threats against U.S. missile defense plans.

11. (C) Isabelle Francois, Director of the NATO Information Office in Moscow (protect), said she believed that Russia had accepted that Ukraine and Georgia would eventually join NATO and was engaged in long-term planning to reconfigure its relations with both countries, and with the Alliance. However, Russia was not yet ready to deal with the consequences of further NATO enlargement to its south. She added that while Russia liked the cooperation with NATO in the NATO-Russia Council, Russia would feel it necessary to insist on recasting the NATO-Russia relationship, if not withdraw completely from the NRC, in the event of Ukraine and Georgia joining NATO.

Comment
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12. (C) Russia's opposition to NATO membership for Ukraine and Georgia is both emotional and based on perceived

strategic concerns about the impact on Russia's interests in the region. It is also politically popular to paint the U.S. and NATO as Russia's adversaries and to use NATO's outreach to Ukraine and Georgia as a means of generating support from Russian nationalists. While Russian opposition to the first round of NATO enlargement in the mid-1990's was strong, Russia now feels itself able to respond more forcefully to what it perceives as actions contrary to its national interests.

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